

Land Development Services

31-03-Building Plan Review and Permit Processing

Fund/Agency: 001/31	Land Development Services	
Personnel Services	\$3,221,669	<p style="text-align: center;">CAPS Percentage of Agency Total</p> <p style="text-align: center;">79.9% 20.1%</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: fit-content;"> ■ Building Plan Review and Permit Processing ■ All Other Agency CAPS </div>
Operating Expenses	\$570,388	
Recovered Costs	\$0	
Capital Equipment	\$0	
Total CAPS Cost:	\$3,792,057	
Federal Revenue	\$0	
State Revenue	\$0	
User Fee Revenue	\$7,728,171	
Other Revenue	\$0	
Total Revenue:	\$7,728,171	
Net CAPS Cost:	(\$3,936,114)	
Positions/SYE involved in the delivery of this CAPS	72/72.5	

► CAPS Summary

This CAPS is a combination of two divisions within the Office of Building Code Services, itself a part of Land Development Services. Both the Permits and the Building Plan Review Divisions protect the health and safety of County citizens and the environment through mandated enforcement of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (VUSBC) and County Codes.

The Permits Division processes applications and issues permits for building, site- and utility-related work. The Permits Division also issues amusement device (carnival ride) permits, assigns street names and addresses for properties in the County, validates the licenses of contractors applying for permits, issues County Home Improvement Contractor licenses, schedules inspections for permitted work, maintains approved plans and permit records, and coordinates Freedom of Information Act requests for the Office of Building Code Services.

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The Building Plan Review Division works closely with architects, engineers and developers in the design phase of construction projects to ensure compliance with the multitude of codes and standards adopted by reference into the VUSBC. Preliminary and post-submission conferences are offered to ensure that major code issues are identified earlier rather than later during the plan review stage. These early contacts between plan reviewers and customers also ensure that submissions are complete and contain the level of detail necessary to ascertain compliance with the VUSBC. The plan review process saves project owners both time and money by minimizing change work orders and any attendant reconstruction necessitated by errors identified, for example, during field inspections of completed work. Staff also coordinates plan review with other County and State agencies and provides technical assistance to permit applicants, designers, builders, contractors and the general public regarding code requirements.

Customers include:

- Homeowners, builders, developers, engineers, architects, and contractors seeking permit, plan and other construction information.
- Attorneys and contract dispute mediators seeking permit records.
- Commercial building owners and design professionals seeking historic records necessary to design improvements to existing structures.

All citizens, however, are the ultimate recipients of a safe and quality environment.

Funding Sources

Under State law, fees may be charged to defray the costs of enforcing the VUSBC. Pursuant to Board of Supervisors' policy, at least 80 percent of the costs of this CAPS are recovered from such fees, as they are incorporated into Chapter 61 of the County Code.

Accomplishments

- In 1997, developed the Expedited Building Plan Review Program that allows building owners and developers to hire private sector, certified Peer Reviewers to conduct a preliminary plan review of commercial projects prior to submission to the County. The project plans are then expedited through the County plan review process, delivering significant savings in time over plans submitted under the normal process. In 1999, this program received a Virginia Municipal League Presidential Award. Later, this program, originally conceived and initiated by Fairfax County, was incorporated into the Virginia Statewide Building Code, making it available to other jurisdictions as of August 1, 2000.
- In 1999, the Commercial Walk-Through Program was expanded to allow individuals making alterations to existing buildings in commercial revitalization districts to expedite the review of their projects. The Modified Processing Program was also expanded to include projects in Revitalization Districts.
- In December, 1999, implemented a "County-wide masterfile program" which expedites a builder's authorization to build a specific model of house at any location in the County upon review and approval of an initial set of plans; held a seminar for design and permit professionals to explain the masterfile system.
- In 2000, developed a computerized database to expedite the review and processing of requests for permit refunds.

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- In 2000, the Building Plan Review Division reorganized to allow individual supervisors to be readily available at public counters to answer questions and provide better customer service.
- In 2000, implemented interactive transactions on the DPWES web site for:
 - 1) Scheduling inspections for issued permits;
 - 2) Tracking permit, plan and inspection status; and
 - 3) Estimating building permit fees.
- Implementation of several streamlining initiatives for which the agency was awarded several 2000 "Streamlining Achievement Awards" by the National Conference of States on Building Codes and Standards, Inc. under their "Streamlining the Nation's Building Regulatory Process Program." These included:
 - One-stop shop, customer ombudsman and quality control programs
 - Effective use of computers
 - Annual Permit Program
 - Pre-application, post-submission and pre-construction meetings
 - The use of hand-outs in lieu of plan review
 - The parallel plan review program
- In 2001, modified the process for demolition permits to address erosion and sediment control issues related to the demolition of larger structures.

Initiatives

- ISIS replacement project which will create the capability to:
 - 1) Issue a single permit for new residential construction that covers building, electrical, mechanical and plumbing work.
 - 2) Issue simple, individual trade permits via the internet.
 - 3) Accept plan submissions electronically.
- Engineers & Surveyors Institute's two-day business process improvement forum with staff and customers: multiple teams of staff and customers are currently working on follow-up to improve customer queue tracking, simplify fees for new residential construction, create position descriptions for a multi-disciplined technician and a master plan reviewer who conceivably could perform reviews for all permit approval disciplines.
- Quarterly meetings with permit service personnel to improve communications and consider process changes.

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- Establishment of an intern program for engineering students from George Mason University to assist in the Permit Application Center during periods of high workload.
- A weekly in-service training program to improve customer service, staff consistency and accuracy in code interpretation/application, as well as provide opportunities for professional development.
- Customer waiting area improvements which include providing access to the County's computerized information, providing wait time and staffing information, and installing a new photocopy machine that better accommodates customers' copying needs.

Trends

- Fairfax County has been experiencing a surge in commercial construction that is expected to level off in the next few years.
- In-fill construction and construction in Revitalization Districts and on properties eligible for the County's tax abatement program will increase.
- Construction will increase on sites that require more engineered designs, for example, sites with poor soils/critical slopes.
- New construction methods and materials will challenge plan reviewers.
- Customers expect 24 hours a day/7 days a week service.
- Customers expect to do business with the County from their own home or business.

Future Initiatives: Where We Are Headed

The Building Plan Review and Permit Processing Divisions envision a future characterized by:

- An increase in Code expertise among private sector professionals.
- An increase in the number of peer reviewers for the Expedited Plan Review Program.
- Virtual one-stop shop for all projects.

► Method of Service Provision

The services of the Permits and Building Plan Review Divisions are provided directly by County employees.

The general hours of operations are: Monday through Thursday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Friday 9:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. but public counters close at 4:00 p.m. to new customers.

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► Performance/Workload Related Data

Title	FY 1997 Actual	FY 1998 Actual	FY 1999 Actual	FY 2000 Actual	FY 2001 Actual	FY 2002 Estimate
Permits issued *	95,594	85,491	89,728	97,407	82,911	95,000
Permits issues per technician	7,353	6,576	7,275	8,117	6,909	7,916
Permits issued on day of application	63%	61%	57%	55%	58.1%	60%
% of buildings experiencing catastrophic system failures as a result of building design	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

* Two issues are pertinent to the fluctuation in the number of permits issued for Fiscal Years 2000 and 2001. The hailstorm of 1999 caused a dramatic increase in the number of permits for re-roofing and re-siding projects. Conversely, effective September, 2000, the VUSBC was amended to delete the requirements for building permits for re-roofing and re-siding projects. In FY 2000, this accounted for 4,710 or 4.8% of the total number of permits issued.

► Mandate Information

This CAPS is Federally or State mandated. The percentage of this CAPS' resources utilized to satisfy the mandate is 76 - 100%. The specific Federal or State code and a brief description of the code follows:

- Code of Virginia, Section 36, which empowers the promulgation of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code. This agency is mandated to enforce this code which prescribed mandatory building construction regulations. (See below.)
- VUSBC. This Code requires local Building Officials to examine all permit applications and plans for compliance with all applicable standards including the BOCA National Building Code, the International Plumbing and Mechanical Codes, the National Electrical Code, the CABO One and Two Family Dwelling Code, etc. and to issue building permits as soon as practical when satisfied that the proposed work conforms to the VUSBC. The Building Official is required to collect asbestos certifications pertaining to building being renovated or demolished. Localities must respond to inspection requests promptly. Localities must retain certain official records.
- Code of Virginia Section 36-105: Localities in the Commonwealth of Virginia are mandated to enforce the VUSBC by reviewing plans, issuing permits and inspecting construction.
- Code of Virginia Section 36-98.3: Localities in the Commonwealth of Virginia are mandated to enforce the VUSBC by issuing permits and inspecting amusement devices.
- VADR: This Code requires localities in the Commonwealth of Virginia to examine all permit applications and to inspect amusement devices for compliance with all applicable standards promulgated by the State Board of Housing and Community Development.
- Code of Virginia Section 10.1-565: Localities which issue building or grading permits may not issue such permits allowing land disturbing activity unless the applicant submits an erosion and sediment control plan and certification that the plan will be followed.

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- Code of Virginia Section 10.1-2100 through 2115 - The Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. This Code requires counties to establish programs that define and protect certain lands, and to ensure that such protection measures have been provided for prior to the issuance of building and construction permits.
- Code of Virginia Section 10.1-1408.1. The Solid Waste Management provisions require that, prior to the issuance of the State permit for a landfill, the locality in which the facility is to be located must certify that the location and operation of the facility are consistent with all applicable ordinances. Section 104-2-1 of the Code of the County of Fairfax requires the Building Official to issue permits for the operation of a debris landfill.
- Code of Virginia Section 36-98.01. Building Officials must include on all residential building permits, at the request of the applicant, information pertaining to the designated mechanics' lien agent or note on the permit that none has been designated.
- Code of Virginia Section 54.1-1111. The Building Official is prohibited from issuing building or other permits prior to verification that the applicant is duly licensed as a contractor or is exempt from such licensure.
- Code of Virginia Section 42.1-76. Localities must comply with regulations issued by the State Library Board to inventory, schedule, and retain official building records.
- Code of Virginia Section 2.1-340.1. Local governments must comply with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act by providing ready public access to records in the custody of public officials.
- Code of Virginia Section 15.2-2024. Localities may, by ordinance, require that each building display a number (address) that is easily readable from the right-of-way.